

THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel claims 1-7, and 22-36, and amend claims 8, 12, 16 and 20, as follows:

1-7 and 22-36 (Cancelled)

8. (Currently amended) The process according to Claim ~~7~~12, wherein the acid chloride of rhein and the hyaluronic acid are in an amount such that a percentage ratio between the mmol of acid chloride of rhein and the meq. of the esterifiable alcohol units of hyaluronic acid is at least 5 %.

9. (Original) The process according to Claim 8, wherein said percentage ratio ranges from 5 %to 50 %.

10. (Original) The process according to Claim 9, wherein said percentage ratio ranges from 5 to 20 %.

11. (Original) The process according to Claim 10, wherein said percentage ratio is 10 %.

12. (Currently amended) ~~The A process for preparing a compound based on hyaluronic acid, wherein alcohol groups of hyaluronic acid are esterified with rhein, as such or in derived form, or a salt thereof according to anyone of Claims 7 to 11,~~ which comprises the following steps:

- a) preparing a suspension of hyaluronic acid in an aprotic non-polar solvent;
- b) adding acid chloride of rhein, as such or in a derived form, dissolved in an aprotic non-polar solvent and a hydrogen ion acceptor;
- c) leaving the mixture to stir at reflux for a time that is sufficient for the esterification reaction to take place; and
- d) evaporating off the solvent.

13. (Original) The process according to Claim 12, wherein said aprotic non-polar solvent of step a) is cyclohexane.

14. (Previously presented) The process according to Claim 12, wherein in step b), said hydrogen ion acceptor is  $\text{NEt}_3$ .

15. (Previously presented) The process according to Claim 12, wherein in step c), the reaction is left at reflux for at least 20 hours.

16. (Currently amended) The process according to Claim ~~7~~12, in which the acid chloride of rhein is obtained by means of a process comprising the following steps:

- a') preparing a suspension of rhein in an aprotic non-polar solvent;
- b') adding an amount of  $\text{SOCl}_2$  so as to obtain a molar ratio between  $\text{SOCl}_2$  and rhein of greater than 10;
- c') leaving the reaction to stir at reflux in an inert atmosphere for a time that is sufficient for the rhein acid chloride to form; and
- d') removing the solvent and the excess of unreacted  $\text{SOCl}_2$  by distillation.

17. (Original) The process according to Claim 16, wherein said aprotic non-polar solvent of step a') is a chloride solvent.

18. (Original) The process according to Claim 17, wherein said chloride solvent is  $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$ .

19. (Previously presented) The process according to Claim 16, wherein in step c'), the reaction is left at reflux for at least 3 hours.

20. (Currently amended) The process according to Claim 712, which further comprises a final step of purification.

21. (Original) The process according to Claim 20, wherein said purification step is carried out using a dialysis membrane.